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# Understanding strengths and school absenteeism in adolescent victims of bullying

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Running Head: STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

Understanding Strengths and School Absenteeism  
In Adolescent Victims of Bullying

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## Abstract

Peer victimization, otherwise known as bullying, is a phenomenon which affects adolescents throughout North America. In victims, bullying is associated with low self-esteem, absenteeism, and many other emotional and behavioral problems. Though anti-bullying programs have historically been focused on psychological deficits (e.g., social difficulties) present in the perpetrators, a move towards a more positive approach in treatment has recently been supported by victimization literature. In this study, seventh- and eighth-grade students were asked to complete inventories assessing their levels of strength and victimization. Absenteeism data was gathered from the school records of the participating students. The relationship between strengths, levels of victimization, and absenteeism was evaluated. While overall levels of strengths had no significant predictive value, students with strengths in school functioning showed a low level of victimization and a low level of absenteeism.

## Understanding Strengths and Absenteeism

### In Early Adolescent Bullying Victims

Research into the area of bullying by adolescents has revealed an extensive problem. This “systematic abuse of power” (Naylor, Cowie, & Rey, 2001; p.114) has widespread effects on victims and bullies alike. The conflicts of childhood are familiar to all of us, and are not without some psychological benefits to the children involved. For example, play-fighting and *bona fide* quarrels with others are common with children and teens, and are not necessarily negative life experiences. Events like these can aid children in understanding the dynamics of interpersonal conflict. While peer victimization may appear similar to these sorts of conflicts on several levels, it is a very different concept altogether. This type of relationship rarely breeds any results of a positive nature and can seriously impact the development of all individuals participating in a bully-victim relationship. Bullying is a global problem for today’s youth, with instances being reported in such diverse locales as Canada, Portugal, Japan, and Norway, as well as many other countries. The severity and the sometimes long-lasting effects of bullying warrant special attention, and viewing this phenomenon from a strengths perspective is a relatively new approach to the problem.

Several issues surrounding victimization will be addressed in this Introduction in order to gain an appreciation of the growing body of victimization research. Aside from the current conceptualizations of bullying, risk factors and outcomes empirically shown to be associated with involvement in a bullying relationship will be discussed. As psychological strengths are a major focus of the proposed study, the applicability of strengths-based approaches to psychopathology and its potential use in analyses of

bullying behaviour will be also discussed before turning our attention toward the current study.

### *Current Conceptualizations of Bullying or Peer Victimization*

Olweus, whose groundbreaking research sparked a myriad of bullying studies, is one of the earliest researchers of bullying. His definition of bullying assigns importance to the chronicity and repetition of the abuse by others: “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, p.9). Such a definition relies upon the existence of repetition of the aggressive behaviour or “negative actions”. If used as the sole definition of bullying, it could potentially be seen to leave out other important factors of the peer victimization phenomenon.

Appearing to build upon Olweus’s (1993) definition, Craig and Pepler (2003) conceptualized bullying as the assertion of power through aggressive acts. These acts soon become apparent to the observer as a power relationship develops between the participants. Craig and Pepler argued that this arrangement becomes polarized over time; as the bully increases in power over the victim, the victim becomes more and more powerless. These power relationships are salient even to children, as noted by Naylor et al. (2001). In a study of 1,835 students in the United Kingdom, participants identified their understanding of bullying, victimization and coping mechanisms, consistent with Craig and Pepler’s argument. One theme that was common in the responses of these students was that of the bully wielding significant power over the victim.

Reviews of the literature indicate that this power relationship is an integral part of many conceptualizations of bullying. Rigby (2003) indicates that for this reason,



bullying is unique among the other types of childhood or adolescent conflicts. In fact, if an inequality of power is not present in the conflict, bullying is not considered to be taking place.

Olweus (1993) sees the problem of bullying as one which directly undermines the most fundamental rights of the victims. Indeed, it has been suggested that the current trend of society's aggressive protection of individual rights around the globe is at least partly responsible for the recent surge in peer victimization research (Smith, 2004). Regardless of the personal characteristics of the players in a bullying scenario, it appears to be a nearly unanimous opinion that children should be able to receive an education in their schools without the fear and psychopathology that stem from peer victimization. Regrettably, there is still much work to be done in order to help students overcome the problem of the schoolyard bully.

Exactly how can a student be bullied? A review of the existing literature has revealed that bullying can assume many forms (Naylor et al., 2001). Bullying is most often understood as falling into one of two broad categories: overt aggression, which is directly evident to the victim and observers, and covert aggression, which is more subtle and insidious in nature. Physical bullying is that which includes physical abuse from one child to another, such as punching, shoving, or kicking. This type of victimization is seen as a variety of overt aggression.

Another type of bullying that has been suggested by Naylor et al. (2001) and others (e.g. Craig & Pepler, 2003) is verbal victimization. To observers, verbal bullying is somewhat less evident than its physical counterpart. It includes such types of aggression as name-calling, taunting, and teasing. Verbal bullying is generally

considered to be an overt attack, as the aggressive and hurtful comments are delivered directly to the intended victim.

In contrast to these overt forms of aggression, victimization via more subtle methods is also well documented (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Naylor et al., 2001; Rigby, 2003; Wood & Wolke, 2001). Relational bullying, sometimes called social exclusion or social manipulation, includes bullying by threatening or actively attempting to injure the intended victim's network of social supports. Alternatively, relational bullying includes attempts to alter the victim's social standing within his or her social environment. An investigation by French, Jansen and Pidada (2002) into relational bullying in American and Indonesian adolescents found that this type of bullying is more commonly found in female bullying relationships than in male ones, in both the United States and Indonesia. This suggests that the sex difference in relational bullying is a global phenomenon.

At its most fundamental level, Rigby (2003) suggests that the goal of relational bullying is to weaken the victim's relationships with others. The effects of this type of abuse, while perhaps not immediately visible to others, can be thoroughly devastating to the victim. Without adequate social supports, a victim could have fewer points of assistance during any subsequent instances of bullying, which could potentially be threatening to his or her health if the victimization becomes physical in nature. As well, a lack of friends may hinder a student's coping ability for dealing with the effects of peer victimization or any other of life's stressors. Social bullying often takes the form of note-passing, rumor-spreading, or threatening to do one of these activities.

Although it may be assumed that bullying is a problem only within the education system of the West, Non-Western cultures are also unwilling hosts to the bullying

phenomenon. Many cultures have shown subtle differences in the way they define the problem, but all definitions essentially describe the same relationship: a student in a power role abusing a less-powerful student in one way or another. The subtle ways in which bullying is understood in different cultures is reflected in the way that victims experience their torments. For example, *ijime*, the closest Japanese equivalent to most English conceptualizations of bullying, manifests itself as having a much higher social exclusion or social manipulation component than is normally seen in English-speaking Western countries (Prewitt, 1988).

#### *Bullying Outcomes and Associated Risk Factors*

The effects of bullying are widespread and impact the victim across many functional domains. Principally, the victim of a bullying relationship often experiences feelings of helplessness due to the power differential with the bully. Rigby (2003) notes that these victims are often characterized by low psychological well-being. This component of the victim's experience is often made up of feelings like unhappiness, low self-esteem, anger and sadness. Victimized individuals often suffer from psychosocial distress, which ranges in severity from anxiety and depression to suicidal ideation. It has been suggested that the feelings of low self-esteem may arise from the feelings of anxiety and depression.

The psychological and social effects of relational bullying have been investigated by Storch & Masia-Warner (2004). Choosing an all-girl school as their research setting, Storch & Masia-Warner examined whether relational bullying was predictive of subjective feelings of loneliness and social anxiety in victims. The results of their study confirmed their hypothesis that relational victimization was predictive of these sorts of

psychological problems. Overt bullying also was correlated with these feelings. Girls who experienced both types of bullying had comparable levels of loneliness and social anxiety to those girls who experienced only relational bullying, but the manifestation of these problems in victims of both bullying types was more severe than in those who experienced only overt victimization. Prosocial behaviour appeared to be a moderator of bullying's effects on loneliness.

Storch and Masia-Warner's (2004) results indicate that the victims of both types of bullying possess a fear of evaluation by others; moreover, these victims are also characterized by an avoidance of general and novel social situations. More information on peer victimization's effects is of importance to the school system. If programs and interventions are to be developed to counteract the bullying phenomenon, as well as the resulting psychological damage to the victims, data on the subjective experience of victimization by all involved parties must be collected in order to best guide these programs' development.

The protection of the victims is not society's sole concern. Bullies themselves are often at risk for a host of difficulties, which, at the severe end of the continuum, can be realized as retaliation by their victims. Wong (2004) also reviews several recent cases in Hong Kong where victims have turned their former bullies into victims of violence themselves. In one of these scenarios, an 11-year-old who had been victimized by a 12-year-old boy chose to violently retaliate after an incident of group bullying, and permanently injured his former bully's eye with a box cutter knife.

A girl from Hong Kong who had been known to bully others was also the recipient of her victims' idea of justice. Wong's (2004) account of the incident is as

follows: after school one day, several of her former victims forced her to take off her clothes and subsequently burned her underwear using a cigarette lighter. The group also wrote things on her body using a marker, and when she tried to resist, her assailants physically assaulted her by beating her and knocking her head against a wall. This assault is, again, an example of how victimization can be an integral part of a vicious cycle of escalating violence.

The work of Kimmel & Mahler (2003) makes some interesting observations of the relationship of peer victimization to gender, and the brutal types of retaliation that can result when a victim has finally “had enough”. The authors reviewed the accompanying situations and “narratives” surrounding all of the school shootings which occurred between 1982 and 2001 in the United States, arguing that this content is more telling than speculation regarding what they term the “form” of the shootings (for example, cultural influences like media violence or family history).

Kimmel and Mahler (2003) provide a list of proposed reasons behind the shootings, but where school shootings intersect with peer victimization may have been revealed by a review of the circumstances of the shooters. The overwhelming majority of the perpetrators had been victimized physically; though perhaps more interestingly, verbal victimization was also present in the form of frequent teasing and threatening. Young and Sweeting (2004) found that gender atypical boys were more likely to be victimized than those who conformed to traditional gender roles, which was true of many of these school shooters.

Kimmel and Mahler (2003) suggest that bullying boys as if they were homosexual is a way of removing their manhood. To cope with this, victimized adolescent males

engage in a variety of activities in the hopes of proving their masculinity – manifesting itself in ways typically associated with adolescent males, such as risk-taking behaviours or bullying. In some extreme cases, these behaviours may be as extreme as murder within the school environment.

It would appear that non-heterosexual (that is, sexual minority) adolescents are more susceptible to certain outcomes of bullying. Williams, Connolly, Pepler and Craig (2005) found that these adolescents, when bullied report more depression and externalizing behaviours than their heterosexual counterparts. Females were found to report more depressive symptoms, whereas males were found to report more externalizing behaviours. It is possible that these externalizing behaviours exhibited by these males are, as suggested by Kimmel and Mahler (2003), attempts at proving the victim's masculinity. Williams et al. suggest that possible alternative explanations for these behaviours are that they are defences against bullying itself or a way of coping with rejection by family and society.

In a study by Ireland (2005), participants who were not involved on either side of a bullying relationship had the lowest levels of psychological problems. Of the groups that were actually involved in such a relationship, bullies had the least amount of adverse psychological symptoms, exhibiting lower amounts of severe depression than the victims. Additionally, bullies in this sample did not exhibit significantly elevated levels of somatic symptoms, social dysfunction, anxiety or insomnia compared to the other groups. Victims who also bully were found to have the most psychological difficulties of any of the groups in the study.

These results mirrored those of Schwartz (2000), who found that victims who also bully other students had difficulties with behavioural and emotional regulation. Moreover, the aggressive victims experienced emotional distress, peer rejection, and academic difficulties. As a point of illustration for the troubles encountered by this group, significant main effects were found for the aggressive victims in areas including lower academic competence, higher emotional dysregulation and lower frequency of assertiveness-prosocial behaviour than the normative sample. Schwartz suggests that the highly reactive nature of the bully-victims as rated by others may serve as an explanation for their extensive victimization, and notes that their relative difficulty in emotional regulation may result in the high levels of peer rejection experienced by this group.

Although Schwartz (2000) found that aggressive victims do have problems in school, not all children involved in bullying behaviour are poor academic performers. Woods & Wolke (2004) found that the type of bullying engaged in by students is correlated to academic performance. In their study of students in a British primary (elementary) school, Woods & Wolke discovered that students in year four who engaged in relational bullying (as opposed to direct physical or verbal bullying) had significantly higher SATs than victims or neutral children. Similarly indicating that bullies may not have as many problems as once thought, Olweus (1993) noted that the common belief that bullies use a façade of aggression to hide the fact that they are insecure or anxious is largely unsupported. In fact, Olweus found that quite the opposite was true, with bullies having average or lower-than-average levels of anxiety and insecurity.

The relationship between bullying and academic success is a complex one, with multiple factors to consider. Lopez and DuBois (2005) found that peer victimization and

peer rejection both contribute to academic adjustment problems for the targets of these behaviours. While it is likely that other factors may cause these difficulties to occur, the observation by Zubrick et al. (1997) that absenteeism of bullied students is higher than non-victimized students cannot be ignored. This large-scale study indicated that 19% of bullied boys have skipped classes compared to four percent of non-victims.

Corresponding figures for females were 25% and 12%, respectively. This absenteeism, Rigby notes, tends to increase as a function of bullying severity and as such needs to be curtailed in order to ensure the academic well being of these students. Consistent with these findings, DeRosier, Kupersmidt & Patterson (1994) found a positive correlation between absences and peer rejection severity.

Evidently, the effects of bullying on school performance need to be addressed and more fully understood. A student who is being bullied by one or more other students may be blocked from realizing his or her full potential in the academic domain. As noted, Rigby's (2003) research, as well as that of DeRosier et al. (1994), indicates that the absenteeism of the victims from school is a problem in and of itself, but is also quite serious in the sense that these children are not receiving the same quantity of instruction as their peers. In situations such as this, the goal of "success for all children" becomes more and more difficult to attain for teachers, parents and the students themselves.

While an investigation into the experience and outcomes of victimization holds a number of important benefits for schools and school boards, an examination into the associated risk factors for bullying and victimization may also reveal important information. Ma (2001), in a study using a large sample of middle-school-aged students from the province of New Brunswick, was able to identify several risk factors promoting



victimization. Having a weak physical condition was correlated with students being either victims or bullies, though this characteristic was much more prevalent among victims than bullies. A sex difference was also found in the sample, with males being either victims or bullies more often than girls. Ma also found that the frequency of peer victimization in large schools was significantly lower than in small schools.

The academic climate of the school plays a role in predicting the presence of bullying. Ma (2001) referred to “academic press” to describe the value placed by the school on academic achievement. Ma’s data indicated that low academic press in the school was a peer victimization risk factor. As well, a heightened presence of bullying behaviour was predicted by low parental involvement in the school. Involving parents more heavily in the school could be an easy and important addition to the development of an anti-bullying intervention.

The involvement of parents in the schools is a protective factor, which Ahmed & Braithwaite (2004) also deem appropriate for anti-bullying interventions. The researchers were investigating the ability of certain variables to predict group membership in one of the three bullying categories (“bully”, “victim”, or “bully-victim”). Ahmed and Braithwaite found that neither school variables nor family variables were able to adequately predict membership in all of the three variables, noting that school variables were less predictive of membership in the “bullying” category, while family variables were weaker in the prediction of “victim” membership.

While bullies and victims appeared to share a dislike of school and reported problems at home, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) suggest that the nature of their problems at home could be quite different. An authoritarian parenting style is linked to

bullying, and harsh parenting could be one reason why bullies find their home lives to be troublesome.

With respect to sex differences in victimization rates, Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner (2002) found that boys and girls were at equal risk for victimization, and as such were both susceptible to peer victimization's accompanying psychological problems. Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner were particularly interested in the types of coping strategies that were employed by the victims of bullying.

Along with sex differences, several maladaptive coping strategies (for example, avoidant behaviour) were discussed in the Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner (2002) study. Girls who avoided their bullying problem by distancing themselves from the situation were found to have more loneliness and more social problems than other girls who did not use this tactic. The negative effects of avoidant behaviour were evident in boys as well, who showed significantly greater amounts of anxiety than their non-avoidant peers.

Ignoring their problems was not wholly negative for boys, however. Pretending that nothing is wrong may be a way for male victims to save face in the eyes of their peers. Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner (2002) argue that this nonchalance is a way of buffering oneself from low peer regard. This suggestion was supported by the fact that victimized students in their sample who used this method of coping were about as well-liked as non-victimized students.

Interestingly, approach methods (that is, problem solving) carried with them some negative side effects. While boys who did not try to solve their problems reported more loneliness than those who did try to take charge of their situation, Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner (2002) suggest that some students who actively attempt to solve some of their

bullying problems may be at a higher risk of peer rejection. Evidently there is no one perfect coping mechanism, and the authors acknowledge that a blending of mechanisms may be the best option for victims of bullying.

Other social predictors of bullying and victimization have been identified by a number of researchers. Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach & Unger (2004) identified a number of these social correlates of peer victimization in a sample of Californian sixth-graders. While the team's sample was of an ethnic composition quite different from the ethnic breakdown of northern Ontario, the risk factors exposed by this study have a theoretical basis and as such are likely to be pertinent to the sample taken from the Thunder Bay school system in our study.

The presence of aggression within children's social networks appears to have a relationship with bullying and victimization (Mouttapa et al., 2004). Bullies and victims who also bully were likely to nominate as friends other aggressive children. Moreover, higher rates of victimization were found for students who had a group of non-aggressive friends, and children with aggressive friends were less likely to be victimized. One suggested reason for this finding is that aggressive friends provide a protective role that non-aggressive friends do not. Mouttapa et al. also suggest that the children may organize their social circles around things they have in common with their peers, one of which could be the predilection toward aggression.

Victims also seem to occupy a lower status in the social realm (Mouttapa et al., 2004), evidenced by the lower number of friendship nominations received by victims compared to their peers. Bullying behaviour, in males at least, did not appear to augment or diminish the bullies' or bully-victims' social standing. In females, bullying behaviour

actually seemed to lower aggressive students' social standing, but this may be counteracted by more closely-knit friendships (shown by a high degree of reciprocity in friendship nominations).

One of the most important implications revealed by Mouttapa et al.'s research is the possibility of bullying interventions diffusing to the friends of the bullies, who are likely also involved in aggressive or bullying activity. Similarly, interventions at the victim level (for example, assertiveness training) may spread to other victims. An appropriate intervention's ability to spread through the social network of the bullies or victims may serve to lessen the burden on the psychologists and support staff providing the intervention service.

#### *A Shift in Focus: The Strengths-Based Approach*

With the host of problems that seem to accompany bullying scenarios, the natural question becomes "what can students do to protect themselves?" It is possible that an arsenal of strengths possessed by the student in question may help him or her surmount the risk factors associated with being bullied.

While much attention is placed, perhaps rightly so, on the problems encountered by students in bullying relationships, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) describe a recent trend in the field of psychology described as "positive psychology". This relatively new body of research presents an intriguing method of understanding the role of psychology and the psychologist, and could quite possibly influence the way we see victimized populations.

Noting that psychology is currently a discipline that deals primarily with fixing things gone wrong, proponents of positive psychology call for a shift in focus (Seligman

& Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The deficit-focused assessments and treatments of the past are increasingly being supplemented with strengths-based approaches. Rhee, Furlong, Turner and Harari (2001) echo this sentiment, and suggest “the traditional medical model concerning problem assessment and remediation is limited in both the scope and nature of information it can provide” (p. 5). In essence, positive psychology appears to subscribe to the proverb, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi suggest that by amplifying strengths (rather than repairing weaknesses), psychologists may be able to prevent certain disorders or emotional difficulties from ever becoming problematic in the first place.

The authors (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) argue that by focusing on the strengths and positive qualities of the individual, and fostering these attributes, “normal” and even exceptional lives may be realized and understood to a greater extent by psychologists. By more closely examining the positive aspects of existence in concert with the current plethora of information surrounding various psychopathologies, the discipline of psychology may have a more rounded perspective of human existence.

Two researchers studying strengths describe the strength-based approach as that which measures qualities or characteristics that “create a sense of personal accomplishment; contribute to satisfying relationships with family members, peers and adults; and promote one’s personal, social, and academic development” (Epstein & Sharma, 1998, p. 3). Epstein, Mooney, Ryser and Pierce (2004) note that all children have strengths, and by focusing on these, motivation and performance may be improved. Similarly, lack of proficiency at a skill should be framed as an opportunity to learn, and

that a focus on strengths may aid in the acceptance of interventions by the necessary involved parties.

According to Sheldon and King (2001), a shift towards positive psychology is desirable because of a current and prevailing negative bias in the science. Many psychologists are quick to interpret seemingly positive or neutral acts in a negative light. This results in, to use the authors' example, acts of altruism being dismissed as being primarily driven by some self-beneficial motive. It is likely that this same "negative bias" extends to inappropriate behaviours – attribution of undesirable behaviours may be understood as symptoms of psychopathology in almost all cases. It is at least possible that in some instances, strengths of the child or adolescent are simply being channeled into maladaptive behaviours. It is similarly possible that their deficits just appear to overshadow the strengths that these students possess. Bullies and victims may each possess positive qualities that are overlooked during a conventional assessment of their respective behaviours.

The benefits of strengths-based practice are evident to Johnson (2003), who has found that a focus on strengths in psychotherapy with adolescent girls has yielded positive results. "As the strength-based approach became routine in my practice, I noted a higher retention rate, a decrease in the number of sessions to mutually satisfactory termination, and a focus on increased competencies during the termination stage" (Johnson, p. 1194). Johnson presents a case illustration outlining a typical strengths-based course of treatment. While Johnson's account is anecdotal in nature, her experience with a strengths-focused approach to therapy is encouraging.

Epstein and Sharma's (1998) Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS), a measure that examines strengths across five domains (interpersonal, intrapersonal, school functioning, family involvement, and affective strengths) is one of the most common assessment tools available for strengths assessment, and has been validated with various populations, such as with very young children (Trout, Ryan, LaVigne & Epstein, 2003). The second version of the measure, the BERS-2, was created in 2004. Epstein, Mooney, Ryser and Pierce (2004) provide a description of the BERS-2's five factors, summarized in Table 1.

Studies of the BERS-2 have shown the measure to possess acceptable convergent validity with other self-report measures, as well as test-retest reliability (Epstein et al., 2004). A study of the BERS-2's convergent validity in an adolescent sample was conducted with children in the sixth and eighth grades. Epstein et al. demonstrated by comparison with other validated self-report measures. For example, scores on the BERS-2 were negatively correlated with scores on the problem scales of the YSR (Achenbach, 1991b). As well, the test-retest reliability was found to be high, with results relatively stable over time.

As the BERS-2 employs forms for multiple informants, there have been studies examining agreement between raters. Synhorst, Buckley, Reid, Epstein and Ryser (2005) conducted a study of the agreement between the self-report form and the parent report form. The researchers found that there was moderate to high agreement between the scales, which speaks to the instrument's valid assessment of strengths in adolescents.

In addition to the BERS-2, other assessments of psychological strengths have been developed. One such tool is the Strength Assessment Inventory (SAI) (Rawana,

Table 1

*Five Subscales of the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale*

Factor/Subscale	Description	Sample Item
Interpersonal Strength	Measures ability to control emotions and behaviours in social contexts	<i>"I can express my anger in the right way"</i>
Family Involvement	Measures participation and relations within the family	<i>"My family makes me feel wanted"</i>
Intrapersonal Strength	Measures child's perception of competence and accomplishment	<i>"I have a sense of humor"</i>
School Functioning	Measures competence in classroom tasks	<i>"I pay attention in class"</i>
Affective Strength	Measures ability to give and receive affect	<i>"I ask for help when I need it"</i>

Cryderman & Thompson, 2000). This team suggests in their definition that strengths encompass skills and competencies across emotional, cognitive and behavioural domains. Moreover, these strengths are valued on both an individual and a social level, and are seen by the researchers to be an indication of the individual's connection to the values and beliefs of their community. A need to understand the protective role of strengths in young offenders inspired the development of the SAI, which was created by modifying a Risk/Need assessment tool used in gauging the likelihood of reoffending by young offenders. Because of the increasing popularity of strength-based assessment and



treatment, the SAI was developed so it could be used with children inside and outside the correctional system.

The SAI is a 50-item questionnaire measuring strengths across six domains, employing a 4-point frequency scale for each item (from “not at all” to “very often”). These domains are summarized in Table 2. This tool, while resembling the BERS on many dimensions, assesses some aspects of these strengths that the BERS does not. For example, one of the domains on the SAI is an assessment of healthy involvement in leisure or recreational activities, whereas the BERS has no corresponding subscale. While norms have yet to be developed for the SAI, it can be completed by teachers, guardians or the students themselves as a self report measure. An outcome of Rawana et al.’s (2000) writings on strength appears to provide evidence for the SAI’s validity as a measure of strengths as protective factors, as reflected in a study by Cartwright (2002).

The data reported by Cartwright (2002) in a study of recidivism among young offenders indicated that young offenders who possess a greater amount of strengths reported fewer behavioural problems while in custody. The youths who had higher amounts of strengths (as assessed via self-report) also seemed to be able to better cope with the problems in their day-to-day lives, or simply have fewer of these types of difficulties.

It is possible that victimized children share an important similarity to the youth who participated in Cartwright’s (2002) study and did not have a wide repertoire of strengths available to them. It is conceivable that victims either have fewer strengths available to them than their non-bullied contemporaries, or a markedly different strengths profile than these other students. In that same line of reasoning, the configuration and

Table 2

*Description of subscales assessed by the SAI (modified from Rawana et al., 2000).*

Subscale	Description of Subscale	Sample Item
1. Family/Home Functioning	Measures strengths in the child's home environment and relationships with family members	<i>"I interact positively with my siblings."</i>
2. School Functioning	Measures strengths relevant to school and academic work	<i>"I arrive on time for classes."</i>
3. Leisure and Recreation	Measures strengths in leisure and recreation	<i>"I play a musical instrument."</i>
4. Peer Functioning	Measures strengths of an interpersonal nature with the student's peers	<i>"I handle conflict with peers effectively and safely."</i>
5. Personality Functioning	Measures strengths in personality	<i>"I have a sense of humour."</i>
6. Community Involvement	Measures strengths related to partnership and involvement in one's community	<i>"I am respectful of community property."</i>
7. Spiritual and Cultural Identity	Measures the student's strengths in spiritual and cultural areas	<i>"I actively participate in cultural or ethnic activities."</i>
8. Future Goals and Aspirations	Measures strengths in planning for the future and goal-setting	<i>"I am motivated to achieve future goals."</i>

*(table continues)*

Table 2 (continued).

Subscale	Description of Subscale	Sample Item
9. Personal and Physical Care	Measures strengths in hygiene, fitness, and general health	<i>"I have good sleeping habits."</i>

intensity of the strengths within the bullies themselves is worthy of investigation. If behavioural problems of young offenders seem to be curtailed by the availability of more personal strengths (as shown by Cartwright), it is logical to hypothesize that the presence of strengths in children may also lessen the prevalence of peer victimization being committed.

The relationship between strengths and psychopathology has been investigated by several researchers, including Walrath, Mandell, Holden & Santiago (2004). Walrath et al. examined the presence of strengths in a group of participants referred for community-based mental health services. The researchers assessed the repertoire of strengths possessed by children and adolescents participating in a separate study. The strengths of the youth were assessed using Epstein and Sharma's (1998) BERS.

The participants in the study were placed in several groups according to the level of impairment they were experiencing, ranging from minimal to severe functional impairment. Walrath's (2004) team discovered a moderate negative correlation between overall strengths and impairment in functioning; however, participants who were experiencing even severe difficulties in functioning possessed near-average levels of strengths. One of the study's greater implications is while that strengths and emotional or behavioural difficulties are related phenomena, they are actually separate constructs.

Given that this is the case, Walrath et al. note that treatment planning for children and adolescents should include components in areas of strength for the individual undergoing treatment.

*Understanding Bullying Relationships from a Strengths-Based Perspective*

Information on the psychological strengths of the participants in a bullying scenario would doubtlessly be useful in the increasing body of knowledge of the victimization dynamic. For example, knowledge of how strengths impact peer victimization resiliency or prevention could lead to an early intervention or anti-bullying program in which students were encouraged to develop strengths in various areas of their life. Whether the strengths are present in the family environment, education/academic ability, their relationships with others, or other domains, they may serve to either immunize a child against the worst effects of bullying. Another possibility is that such a program would give him or her a toolkit with which to help cope with victimization should it occur, including additional resources that the child can draw upon that may not have been developed otherwise.

Intricately connected to strengths-based assessment and treatment is the concept of resilience, which is in opposition to the normal approach of probing solely for risk factors. One researcher provided a concise summary of the resilience phenomenon and its application to treatment plans:

[A] difficulty with the risk approach is that, even when identified, many risk factors such as poverty, family dysfunction, abuse, being taken into local authority care and/or personal attributes are not easy to change. There has therefore been a move towards studying what keeps high-risk individuals from engaging in problem behaviours and naming these as protective factors. Some interventions have begun to focus on increasing protective

factors, as in many cases it is more realistic to do this than to eliminate risk.

(Dearden, 2004, p.187)

The research by Dearden (2004) into the experience of youth undergoing treatment and care by local authorities indicates that keeping the lines of communication open with respect to bullying is paramount. By interviewing teenagers involved in these types of care settings, Dearden learned that an atmosphere where incidents and reports of bullying were taken seriously was a protective factor for these youth. In other words, simply paying attention to their concerns on the subject of bullying fostered the adolescents' resiliency. Logically, Dearden's finding in this area makes sense. Youth who are made to feel secure and who are not concerned about being victimized will have less extraneous anxiety while they attempt to confront whatever difficulties they may be experiencing.

Similar to this line of logic is research conducted by Walker & Lee (1998), whose work with children of alcoholics invites certain parallels to be drawn with peer victimization phenomena. Both children of alcoholics and victims of bullying seem to be given a sort of unsolicited diagnosis; that is, they are judged to likely have psychological difficulties *not* because of problems within themselves, but rather as a result of the psychopathologies of those around them. Walker & Lee note that for a long period of time, the scientific literature focused on the challenges facing the children of parents with alcohol dependence. It has only recently become the case that strengths and resiliency in this population have been investigated. As a result, assessment and treatment of children of alcoholics has, in some circles, been reconceptualized in order to foster the development of strengths and resiliency. The development of these qualities in children

of alcohol dependent parents may serve to protect them against some of the risks associated with their families' difficulties with alcohol and other substances.

At least in Hong Kong, a strengths-based approach to the bullying phenomenon seems to be effective, according to Wong (2004). Historically, the Asian city's prescription for situations involving bullying has been approached from two major orientations. Time has shown a suppressive approach to be ineffective in decreasing the negative effects associated with bullying. Suppressive approaches to bullying are those that are bully-centered and are punitive in nature. Suspension, shaming, and calling parents for a meeting are techniques used in a suppressive approach to bullying behaviour. It is notable that these are all tactics that are also used in Western schools in a large proportion of cases.

Wong (2004) indicates that these measures are often counterproductive to the goal of stopping victimization. According to the existing research, the severity of the reaction to the bullying may actually worsen the bully-victim relationship, in contrast to the benefits associated with the bully to undertaking certain restorative tasks. Wong also mentions the possibility that the backlash by authority figures may also serve to heighten the delinquent behaviour associated with bullying.

The anti-bullying strategy advocated by Wong (2004) is one that appears to be largely strengths-based in nature. Bullies, victims, parents and teachers all appear to benefit from the regimen developed by Wong. The result is a city-wide strategy which communicates to all parties involved that the problem of bullying is very real and will be treated as such. Wong advocates development of character and truth-telling in victims, who sometimes refrain from telling the necessary parties important information regarding

their abuse. The researcher notes that the often passive nature of the victims results in them rarely confronting a bully directly, or in the victim blaming his or her own qualities for their victimization. What Wong terms “building character” is actually a program teaching teenagers to be assertive, so they need not be afraid of attempting to resolve conflicts with potential bullies.

Strengths development also comes into play in Wong’s (2004) program with the bullies themselves. Wong claims that first-time bullies may not seek to bully another child, but rather lack the necessary social knowledge to allow them to resolve their conflicts peacefully. These children are given instruction in social skills, emotion management and communication, as there may be certain deficiencies in these areas that allow the bullying behaviour to initially commence. By developing interpersonal weaknesses into strengths in these areas, former bullies may be given a new opportunity for rich and fulfilling relationships with other students that they may not have had if they were subjected to a more punitive strategy addressing their behaviour.

Wong (2004) also encourages the development of problem solving and conflict resolution skills on the part of all involved in order to promote a peaceful environment. Special mention is given to restorative practices, in which bullies may be able to see what their victim has been made to feel on account of their victimization. It is very possible that for all the measures included in Wong’s comprehensive anti-bullying strategy, a strengths assessment of the involved parties could dictate which areas need the most development and which areas can be used to help quicken the development of these skills.

An investigation into strengths as protective factors for roles in peer victimization would be a strong supplement to recent research into the coping methods employed by bullying victims (James & Owens, 2004; Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004). Kochenderfer-Ladd found that the types of coping mechanisms employed by students to deal with acts of schoolyard harassment were linked to their emotional response to the victimization. Additionally, for victims, the negative emotional reactions resulting from being victimized were felt more intensely than their non-victimized peers.

Taken in concert, these two findings imply that those students who experience more intense emotional reactions may also choose maladaptive coping strategies.

Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004) offers this example:

...[C]hildren who reported they would feel scared or embarrassed in abusive peer situations were more likely to seek advice whereas those who reported feeling angry were not only less likely to ask for help, but they were also more likely to seek revenge. (p. 344)

Clearly, students whose emotional responses to aggression are low in intensity are able to reap the rewards of choosing more appropriate and effective coping strategies for dealing with their maltreatment. Conflict resolution strategies and advice seeking, generally considered to be coping methods associated with decreased future victimization and internalizing symptoms, were found to be ignored more often by students who reacted with anger toward their harassment.

Perhaps the greatest justification for examining strengths as they relate to bullying has been illuminated by the work of Farmer, Clemmer, Leung, Goforth, Thompson, Keagy et al. (2005). Farmer et al.'s (2005) study examining the relevance of strength-based assessment of rural African-American adolescents provided some valuable



justification for using such assessments in clinical and non-clinical populations alike.

The relationship between strengths and the presence of behavioural and emotional disorders in this low-income and at-risk population was investigated.

Farmer et al. (2005) obtained information on the participants in their study through a variety of methods. Multiple informants, such as parents, teachers, and the students themselves, completed reports on each student participating in the study. Additionally, the school record form was examined in order to obtain school grades for each participant. Included among the tools used by Farmer's team were several forms of the BERS. Teachers also rated each child in a variety of ways according to what role they saw fulfilled by the student.

Consistent with previous research, Farmer et al. (2005) found that the presence of a variety of strengths was conducive to success in a variety of domains. In particular, school grades, popularity, leadership and friendliness were among the areas positively associated with girls' high scores on the strengths measure. In boys, high strengths were positively associated with higher grades.

Similarly, strengths were negatively correlated with certain psychological problems (Farmer et al., 2005). Internalizing symptoms, aggressiveness, attention problems, and interpersonal difficulties in girls were some of the emotional and behavioural problems that a large repertoire of strengths seemed to protect against. In boys, the true value of a strengths assessment was evident as the levels of strengths appeared to differentiate between children with emotional or behavioural problems and those without. High levels of strengths were negatively associated with externalizing symptoms, including aggression and attention problems. Most notably in the context of

the proposed study, there was a negative association between levels of strengths and bullying (including relational victimization) as well as being victimized by others.

These last findings by Farmer and colleagues (2005) give support to the hypothesis that a good repertoire of strengths serves as a protective measure against bullying and victimization - even the normally elusive relational bullying seemed to be influenced by the presence of strengths in boys. However, there are several methodological aspects of Farmer et al.'s study that could benefit from an attempt to replicate their findings.

Farmer et al. (2005) acknowledge that one limitation of their study is an inability to generalize their findings across cultures and social status, having conducted their research on a low-income, rural, African American sample. Thus, investigating the relationship of bullying to strengths in a predominantly European Canadian and Aboriginal Canadian sample in a more urban setting would lend support to Farmer et al.'s findings from a cross-cultural standpoint.

As bullying was not the primary focus of Farmer et al.'s (2005) study, it is understandable that their assessment of the presence of victimization was somewhat limited. The measure of bullying, for example, was limited to teacher ratings of each of the participating students. A lack of student information into whether or not they were bullied could have changed the results of the study, though most likely, the relationship of strengths to bullying may be even more prominent if this were the case. Nevertheless, assumptions are worthless without adequate evidence, and so a victimization measure from the perspective of the students may shed more light on the topic. Finally, due to the nature of Farmer et al.'s (2005) hypothesis, the focus of the questionnaire given to the

teachers in the study was more of a global assessment of the children in question, instead of a measure whose primary focus is bullying. While it is admirable that bullying was deemed important enough by the researchers to include in their study, an investigation into bullying using a measure more sensitive to the problem would likely be beneficial.

The problems associated with victimization are far reaching and have a great impact on a student's life. Bullying results in psychological problems, such as depression and externalizing behaviours (e.g., Williams et al., 2005). As well, bullied students are often absent from school (e.g., DeRosier et al., 1994), a behaviour which is correlated with poor academic performance (Shimoff & Catania, 2001). It is possible that possession of certain psychosocial strengths or competencies could help prevent students from being bullied, as suggested by Farmer et al. (2005). Strengths may also be correlated with school performance.

#### *The Current Study*

The current study encompassed several of the heretofore-discussed topics. This study contained exploratory and replicatory elements. While Farmer et al.'s (2005) findings focused on the aggressors in a bullying relationship in a much different cultural and demographic context, similar results were expected for individuals on the victim end of a bullying relationship – that strengths would be predictive of low victimization rates. Exploring the relationship between these two constructs would serve to increase the growing body of literature on strengths and victimization.

The current study had several major hypotheses. The first of these was in relation to the strengths possessed by the participants. It was expected that several group differences would emerge from analysis of the bullying and strengths questionnaires.

Students scoring high in overall victimization were expected to score low on measures of overall strengths, and vice-versa. Other variables that the study aimed to examine are sex differences and absenteeism.

Sex differences in bullying and strengths were expected occur in a Northern Ontario sample. A European study (Pereira et al., 2004) indicated that boys are more likely to be involved in bullying, but an investigation into the common Canadian sex roles with respect to peer victimization was expected to aid in increasing the currently available body of cross-cultural knowledge.

Thus, it was expected that sex differences would emerge from the results of this study. It was hypothesized that girls will be more likely than boys to victimized socially and less likely than boys to be victimized physically. The exploratory nature of the study's "strengths" component was aimed at seeing if certain configurations of psychological strengths appear to differentially insulate girls and boys from various types of bullying.

The relationship of school attendance to school performance is widely known. For example, Shimoff and Catania (2001), by having one group of undergraduate students sign in to each class as a check for absenteeism, showed attendance was related to higher academic performance in comparison to a control group. In a study of 14 and 16 year olds, Petrides, Chamorro-Premuzic, Frederickson and Funham (2005) found a similar negative relationship between absenteeism and school performance. Absenteeism appears to play a sizeable role in students' academic difficulty in many cases, and any insight into ways of promoting school attendance among bullying victims will be in their best academic interest.

This study aimed to generate a better understanding of the relationship between victimization and absenteeism by replicating, in a Canadian adolescent sample, the findings of Zubrick et al. (1997) and DeRosier et al. (1994). These research teams showed that the amount of absences from school was positively correlated with bullying severity. Moreover, the current study aimed to extend this research to include information on the protective nature strengths may play against absenteeism in bullying victims. It was expected that higher amounts of overall psychological strengths in victims would be reflected in lower levels of absenteeism than in victims with fewer strengths in their psychological repertoire.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants were recruited by sending out parental consent forms. Those students whose parents had returned signed forms were given the choice to give their own consent to take part in the study by filling out a separate form. Consent to obtain grades of students and administer the surveys during class time was obtained from teachers of affected grades and principals of affected schools. While teachers were originally expected to provide the absenteeism data, the principals of the schools had easier access to such data and elected to take the responsibility. Ethical clearance for this project was received from both the Lakehead University research office and the Lakehead Public School Board.

The measures used in this study were completed by a sample of seventh- and eighth-grade students enrolled in three public schools that were randomly selected within the Thunder Bay public school board. While approximately 300 consent forms were

given to teachers, consents were received for about 100 students. Because some of the students were absent on the days of data collection, it led to only 96 students taking part in the actual survey. The sample was composed of 48 males and 37 females, in addition to 11 respondents who failed to provide their sex, leading to their exclusion from the study. Concerns over the representativeness of the sample are reasonable. It is a possibility that parents who believed their child was being bullied were more likely to return signed consent forms.

The mean age of boys in the study was 12.96 years with a standard deviation of .74 years. The mean age of girls was 12.92 with a SD of .68 years. There was no significant difference between the mean age of the participants,  $t(83) = .251, p > .250$ . Eighth grade students made up a small majority, composing slightly over 56% of the sample. No grade data was available for four participants. All students were provided time away from their regular coursework in order to fill out the surveys. They were also reminded on several occasions that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

As this is a sample below the age of majority, consent needed to be given from parents and guardians in order for their children to participate in the study. Additionally, consent from the involved principals and participating teachers was also obtained. Appendices A-J provide the consent forms and cover letters that were used to obtain permission from the relevant parties.

### *Materials*

With the exception of absenteeism data, which was provided to the research team by principals of the participating schools, all data was obtained via the use of self-report

measures. A modified version of Mynard and Joseph's (2000) Multidimensional PVS was administered to the students. The Multidimensional PVS is a measure that includes 16 items assessing victimization, which can be broken down into four main factors. The factors that the researchers were able to derive from the original 45 items on the instrument were Physical Victimization, Verbal Victimization, Social Manipulation and Attacks on Property. The scale requires students to indicate how often a particular type of victimization occurred over the school year, by placing a checkmark in one of three boxes (not at all, once, more than once). This tool was modified to encompass only the last two months of experience, as opposed to over the last year. Interestingly, the "attacks on property" factor has not been especially prevalent in bullying literature, but Mynard and Joseph (2000) contend that it is a very real problem associated with bullying, particularly with males. Items loading on this factor include "*stole something from me*" and "*took something of mine without permission*".

The Multidimensional PVS appears to be a useful and valid tool in the assessment of victims' experiences with bullying. Items on the Multidimensional PVS have reasonably good face validity. For example, "*punched me*" has an understandably high loading on the first factor, "physical victimization".

The convergent validity of the MPVS was also discussed in Mynard and Joseph's (2000) study. The results of their research indicated that victimization rates of boys and girls are consistent with previous research across the various types of bullying. Additionally, when compared against self-reports of victimization or non-victimization, the measure showed a significant ability to discriminate between groups in all of the four bullying categories.

Appendix K shows the original Multidimensional PVS in its entirety. Internal consistency of the items in each subscale was satisfactory, ranging from a low of .73 (attacks on property) to a high of .85 (physical victimization). As the original instrument's language and format has been subtly modified for use with the current sample, the revised version which was used in the study can be found in Appendix L.

Also administered to the students were two self-report measures aimed at assessing strengths. First among these was the checklist section of the self-report version of the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Epstein & Sharma, 2004). As has been discussed previously, the BERS-2 is a widely-used assessment tool that measures strengths across five factors. Those five factors measured by the BERS are "interpersonal strengths", "family involvement", "intrapersonal strength", "school functioning", and "affective development".

Because of its apparent ability to assess several domains of strength not included in the BERS-2, Rawana et al.'s (2000) Strengths Assessment Inventory was included in the current study. For example, the Spiritual and Cultural Identity, the Leisure and Recreation, and the Community Involvement subscales on the SAI lack an exact counterpart on the BERS-2. The study's use of the SAI was hoped to serve two additional functions. The first was that the usage of this relatively new tool alongside the BERS would provide the SAI with additional validity information. The second goal was to generate norms for the groups of participants involved in this study and to develop a database.

Self-report tools were used because some of the types of victimization (for example, relational bullying) may be difficult for observers to recognize. As well, the



possibility that the students' perception of their own strengths is influenced by the degree to which they have been victimized was taken under consideration in the choice to use self-reports.

### *Procedure*

In collaboration with school administrative staff, times were arranged that provided students an opportunity to complete the measurement tools. Data was collected in the late winter and early spring of 2006.

Participating students were provided with the questionnaires during regular class time. The surveys took most students between 40 minutes and one hour to complete. Students were instructed to keep their answers to themselves and refrain from talking, and for the most part this instruction was respected. In one of the schools, the participants needed to be reminded of this several times, as they were somewhat talkative during the period in which the questionnaires were completed.

Absenteeism data for participating students was provided by the principals of participating schools. After the collection of this data was complete, identifying information was separated from the questionnaires to preserve privacy and anonymity while analyzing the data.

### *Results*

Items on the SAI were scored *0 = not at all, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = very often*. The existence of some missing data necessitated a satisfactory solution. Missing scores in the data set for the BERS-2 and the SAI were treated the same way. When there was a combination of two or fewer missing values, or values coded as "Does Not Apply" on the SAI, these items were given the average score for the remaining items on

that particular subscale. If there were more than two such items on a subscale, that subscale was not calculated due to concerns over a decrease in its reliability and validity. Since the global measures of strength depend on the smaller subscales, these attempts to preserve the accuracy of the data led to a lower number of participants with a full BERS-2 Strength Index or an SAI Quotient.

The absentee rates for those students identified as victims were examined in the context of two variables, strengths and victimization. In order to control for several extremely high scores on the days absent variable, the variable was split at the median in order to create a binary variable (high absenteeism and low absenteeism).

For the strengths-based instruments, two global indicators of overall strength were calculated. In the BERS-2, the BERS-2 Strength Index was calculated by the addition of the scaled scores for each of the five subscales. The SAI's global measure, a strength quotient, was calculated by adding the participant's total score for each subscale, then dividing by the sum of the maximum score for each subscale.

In order to ascertain the degree of relatedness between the BERS-2 and the SAI, a correlation matrix was generated. All subscales of the BERS-2 and the SAI (see Tables 1 and 2, respectively) were included in the correlation matrix, along with the BERS-2's global Strength Index and the SAI's global strength quotient. There was a strong and significant correlation between the BERS-2's Strength Index and the SAI's strength quotient,  $r(70) = .712, p < .01$ , indicating a high relatedness between the two scales. This finding provides good evidence of the SAI's concurrent validity with the BERS-2

The correlations of the SAI's subscales with those of the BERS-2 were significant at a level of  $p < .01$ , with the exception of the Spiritual and Cultural Identity subscale.

The lowest correlation was between the SAI's Spiritual and Cultural subscale and the BERS-2's Interpersonal Strength (IS) subscale,  $r(80) = .260, p < .05$ . The strongest significant correlation was between the School Functioning subscales on the SAI and BERS-2,  $r(84) = .764, p < .01$ . To illustrate the degree of relatedness between the components of the SAI and the BERS-2, correlations between the two measures' subscales may be seen in Table 3.

These results suggest that although, for the most part, an adolescent's spiritual and cultural competencies are not highly related to strengths in other domains, strengths in diverse areas of functioning are positively correlated with each other. It is possible that having strengths in multiple areas provides adolescents with a greater degree of confidence when faced with new challenges or novel situations. Another possible explanation for the correlations between subscales is that proficiency in other areas of functioning provides students with a sort of toolkit to draw upon in unfamiliar experiences.

It is important to note that, generally speaking, the correlations between the subscales of the BERS-2 and the SAI are stronger for theoretically related scales. For example, the SAI's Family and Home Environment subscale is correlated more strongly with the Family Involvement subscale than with the School Functioning subscale on the BERS-2. This, too, shows evidence of the SAI's concurrent validity with the BERS-2. The fact that the Spiritual and Cultural Identity subscale on the SAI did not correlate strongly with the BERS-2's subscales suggests that it assesses an area of functioning that is overlooked by the BERS-2.

Table 3

*Correlations Between BERS-2 Subscales and SAI Subscales*

Subscale		Interpersonal	School	Family	Intrapersonal	Affective
		Strength	Functioning	Involvement	Strength	Strength
FH	<i>r</i>	.566**	.406**	.620**	.372**	.292**
	<i>n</i>	82	82	82	82	82
LR	<i>r</i>	.525**	.477**	.455**	.434**	.381**
	<i>n</i>	82	82	82	82	82
PR	<i>r</i>	.525**	.454**	.467**	.435**	.532**
	<i>n</i>	81	81	81	81	81
PF	<i>r</i>	.617**	.586**	.475**	.552**	.407**
	<i>n</i>	81	81	81	81	81
CI	<i>r</i>	.531**	.488**	.555**	.420**	.376**
	<i>n</i>	84	84	84	84	84
SC	<i>r</i>	.260*	.271*	.400**	.267*	.272*
	<i>n</i>	80	80	80	80	80
FG	<i>r</i>	.361**	.434**	.454**	.495**	.477**
	<i>n</i>	84	84	84	84	84

*(table continues)*

*Note.* Columns represent subscales of the BERS-2, whereas rows indicate SAI subscales. FH = Family and Home Environment. LR = Leisure and Recreation. PR = Peer Relationships. PF = Personality Functioning. CI = Community Involvement. SC = Spiritual and Cultural Identity. FG = Future Goals and Aspirations. SsF = School Functioning (SAI version).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 3 (continued).

Subscale		Interpersonal	School	Family	Intrapersonal	Affective
		Strength	Functioning	Involvement	Strength	Strength
PP	<i>r</i>	.442**	.423**	.461**	.436**	.411**
	<i>n</i>	84	84	84	84	84
SsF	<i>r</i>	.563**	.764**	.442**	.387**	.298**
	<i>n</i>	84	84	84	84	84

*Note.* Columns represent subscales of the BERS-2, whereas rows indicate SAI subscales. FH = Family and Home Environment. LR = Leisure and Recreation. PR = Peer Relationships. PF = Personality Functioning. CI = Community Involvement. SC = Spiritual and Cultural Identity. FG = Future Goals and Aspirations. SsF = School Functioning (SAI version).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

There were no significant correlations between either types of victimization or total victimization and days absent for this sample. Types of victimization were, however, significantly correlated with each other and total victimization at the  $p < .01$  level. Correlations between types of victimization were of weak to moderate strength. The lowest correlation between victimization subtypes was between verbal victimization and physical victimization,  $r(79) = .495, p < .01$ . The strongest correlation was between verbal victimization and social victimization,  $r(80) = .629, p < .01$ . These findings suggest that students who are bullied, regardless of their sex, are targeted in a number of different ways, be they physically, socially, verbally, or via attacks on their property. Table 4 presents the correlations calculated between each victimization subtype, total victimization, and days absent.

Table 4

*Correlations Between Total Victimization, Victimization Subtypes, and Absenteeism*

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Days Absent	<i>r</i>	1	.065	.114	-.049	.098	.071
	<i>n</i>	85	81	80	80	79	74
2. Physical Victimization	<i>r</i>	.065	1	.500**	.489**	.518**	.750**
	<i>n</i>	81	81	78	78	78	74
3. Social Victimization	<i>r</i>	.114	.500**	1	.624**	.549**	.838**
	<i>n</i>	80	78	80	79	76	74
4. Verbal Victimization	<i>r</i>	-.049	.489**	.624**	1	.585**	.864**
	<i>n</i>	80	78	79	80	76	74
5. Property Victimization	<i>r</i>	.098	.518**	.549**	.585**	1	.830**
	<i>n</i>	79	78	76	76	79	74
6. Total Victimization	<i>r</i>	.071	.750**	.838**	.864**	.830**	1
	<i>n</i>	74	74	74	74	74	74

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

In addition to these correlations, a sex difference in bullying was found for physical victimization. As Levene's test for equality of variances was significant ( $F = 8.623, p < .01$ ), equal variances of the groups were not assumed. Confirming one of the hypotheses regarding bullying, males were significantly more likely to be physically victimized than females,  $t(76.87) = -1.404, p < .01$ . There were no significant sex differences for the other subtypes of bullying, including relational bullying which was

expected to be more prevalent in girls. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to see if any of the BERS-2's subscales significantly predicted a level of absenteeism.

Entering the BERS-2's five subscales into the regression analysis in one step yielded no significant predictors of absenteeism. When the scales were entered independent of one another, School Functioning was significantly predictive of a low level of absenteeism, regardless of sex,  $r^2 = .097$ ,  $F(1, 83) = 8.935$ ,  $p < .01$ .

A second multiple regression analysis using the Strengths Assessment Inventory revealed no significant predictive relationship between total level of strengths and absenteeism. The SAI's School Functioning scale, as its counterpart in the BERS-2, was the only subscale that was significantly predictive of absenteeism,  $r^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 82) = 4.832$ ,  $p < .05$ . High scores on this scale were predictive of low absenteeism.

Prediction of victimization using strengths measures was somewhat more complex. Neither the Strengths Assessment Inventory quotient nor the BERS-2 Strength Index were able to predict victimization at an acceptable level of significance, though the BERS-2 Strength Index showed a trend towards such a relationship,  $r^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 72) = 3.52$ ,  $p < .10$ . It is very possible that this trend would provide a significant result with a larger pool of participants.

As with absenteeism, high scores on the BERS-2's School Functioning subscale were predictive of low total victimization,  $r^2 = .107$ ,  $F(1, 72) = 8.662$ ,  $p < .01$ , though there were no other BERS-2 subscales which predicted victimization. In order to see if the SAI's School Functioning subscale was also a significant predictor of low victimization, a regression analysis was conducted with the School Functioning subscale as the sole independent variable. This subscale was also predictive of low total

victimization,  $r^2 = .06$ ,  $F(1, 72) = 5.185$ ,  $p < .05$ . Similar research conducted with a larger sample may reveal larger effect sizes for School Functioning's prediction of victimization, as the effect sizes found in the current study were small.

Because the means of male and female students differed on the School Functioning subscale [ $t(82) = -2.692$ ,  $p < .01$ ], the ability to predict total victimization using School Functioning scores was examined for both sexes. The results of the regression equation showed that the score on the School Functioning subscale was a significant predictor of bullying for male students [ $r^2 = .105$ ,  $F(1, 38) = 4.469$ ,  $p < .05$ ] but not for female students [ $r^2 = .029$ ,  $F(1, 32)$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. These results suggest that strengths in school performance may serve to protect only boys from being bullied.

After examining the predictive properties of the School Functioning subscale in isolation, a second multiple regression was conducted, this time with all of the SAI's subscales. Interestingly, when all of the SAI's subscales were entered simultaneously into the regression analysis, the effect of School Functioning appeared to be masked by the other subscales. However, the regression equation remained significant,  $r^2 = .286$ ,  $F(9, 52) = 2.311$ ,  $p < .05$ . The two variables which emerged as significant predictors in this particular regression equation were the Personality Functioning and Spiritual and Cultural Identity subscales. The means of male and female students on these subscales did not significantly differ from one another.

There is an intriguing aspect to this last finding which calls for some elaboration. High scores on the Personality Functioning subscale predicted lower total victimization. This relationship is not especially surprising; it is reasonable to suspect that possessing a variety of strengths in personality functioning makes students poor targets for bullying,



as they may be less reactive or provocative than students who do not have many strengths in this area. The emergence of spiritual and cultural strengths as a significant predictor of bullying was somewhat unexpected. Possible explanations for this finding are discussed below.

### Discussion

Aside from providing information on the relationships between bullying, strengths, and absenteeism, this study provided valuable psychometric information on the SAI. Both of these facets of the study will be discussed in this section, followed by a brief look at some of the limitations facing this study.

A success of this study has been to provide evidence of the SAI's concurrent validity with other strength-based assessment tools. The correlations between the subscales of the SAI and those of the BERS-2 indicate that the SAI is capturing the type of information it is aimed at capturing; that is, information on psychosocial strengths. Moreover, scales which were expected to be related were generally more strongly correlated than scales which were theoretically dissimilar. Given the lower correlations of the Spiritual and Cultural Identity subscale with the BERS-2's subscales, it would also appear that the SAI assesses some areas of strength that are not captured by the BERS-2, thereby widening the field of strength assessment and warranting its place among the tools used in strength-based assessment and intervention.

Some important deviations from anticipated results were found in this study. The notable absence of a significant predictive relationship between overall strengths and victimization was somewhat surprising, but the ability of individual subscales to predict the level of bullying experienced by respondents warrants some further discussion.

The insulation from bullying which seems to stem from good school functioning (as measured by both the BERS-2 and the SAI) would seem to contradict conventional wisdom regarding the social value of school performance. Rather than being targeted for being “nerds” or “brains”, these students appear to be at less risk for victimization. It is also possible that the students who possess many school functioning strengths simply devote more time to academic pursuits, rendering them physically removed or unavailable to those who would choose to abuse them.

These results are reminiscent of those obtained by Ma (2001) regarding the relationship of academic press to bullying. It is possible, and indeed probable, that schools with higher academic press tend to foster academic and school functioning strengths in the students. This appears to be a direct example of one’s environment directly influencing the strengths that he or she possesses. Practically speaking, this finding provides some justification for strength-based treatment in general. There may be a way for strength-based treatments to build areas of competency and excellence which simultaneously protect children from being victimized.

Arguably the most surprising result of this study was that high levels of spiritual and cultural strengths, as assessed by the SAI’s Spiritual and Cultural Identity subscale, were predictive of increased victimization. One observation that can be made is that possessing certain strengths may not be advantageous in all situations. In the case of bullying, spiritual and cultural strengths actually appear to be related to being victimized. One possible explanation for this finding is that students who possess high levels of spiritual strengths may be less likely to retaliate against aggressors. As such, they could become easy targets for the bullies. Similarly, a high investment in cultural values and

practices may draw negative attention to a student if other students find some of his or her culture's behaviours to be unusual or offensive.

This study's failure to find any significant correlations between subtypes of victimization and absenteeism contradicts the findings of other studies (e.g., DeRosier et al., 1994). Failure to replicate the findings of these studies may be due in part to some of the present study's limitations.

#### *Limitations*

There were several problems with the current study which may impact the study's validity and make it difficult to generalize its results. The inability to recruit a larger pool of participants likely played a role in the failure to observe all predicted group differences. Differences in some key analyses approached significance, such as the BERS-2's ability to predict high or low victimization in the participants. With the additional power afforded by a larger pool of participants, the researchers suspect that more significant differences would emerge.

Although Thunder Bay has a relatively small population of about 120,000, any concerns about generalizing results from a small city are likely unjustified, according to the existing victimization literature. For example, one study from Portugal (Pereira, Mendonça, Neto, Valente & Smith, 2004) found that the incidence of bullying in the densely populated southern region of the country was similar to that of the more rural northern region. Olweus (1993) found similar results in Norway, suggesting that rates of bullying are similar despite major differences in population. In other words, results obtained from this city are likely to be replicable across the country.

The measures used in the study were in some ways less than optimal. The version of the Strengths Assessment Inventory (Rawana et al., 2000) used in the analysis has since been refined, and several improvements were made on the instrument during the latest revisions. As such, it is possible that the observed data on the students' strengths was not as accurate as they might have been with the revised instrument. Nevertheless, the strong correlation of the SAI's strength quotient with the BERS-2 indicates that the version of the SAI which was used provides accurate and valid information pertaining to the participating students' strengths.

Similarly, Mynard and Joseph's (2004) Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale was modified slightly from its original version. This fact, coupled with the fact that only one measure of victimization was used, may compose part of the reason there was no significant relationship between victimization and absenteeism. Additionally, the MPVS is a self-report tool. In the future, it would be advisable to use multiple measures of victimization from various informants in order to make the victimization data as robust as possible. Combined with a larger sample size, a relationship between these the constructs of victimization and absenteeism may be able to emerge.

Another problem with the MPVS is that it fails to assess the power dynamics involved in bullying relationships. While Mynard and Joseph's (2004) study indicated satisfactory convergent validity of the MPVS with other bullying measures, it is still possible the necessity of power relationships was ignored by the study's participants.

Some of the school administrators involved in the study expressed that there was a strong effort being made against bullying. If other schools with a more tolerant approach to bullying had been randomly selected, the inclusion of their students may

have yielded different levels of victimization. As noted, Dearden (2004) found that the school's approach to bullying, if responsive and expressly willing to listen to students' relevant concerns, serves as a protective factor against peer victimization. It may have been appropriate to include some sort of measure which assessed the students' perceptions of their school's approach to bullying.

### *Implications and Future Directions*

The results of this study may lead to a modest change in anti-bullying strategies. Further research into administrations of the SAI and BERS-2 to bullying victims could include an item analysis component, which would help educators and psychologists find common areas of strength that commonly need to be developed in victims of bullying.

As expected, this study provided evidence that strengths in school are closely related to absenteeism. The school's engagement of the student thus becomes important in keeping students from falling behind academically. Staying true to a theme in this study, an effort should be made to understand and incorporate the strengths of chronically absent students into lesson planning. It's possible that with some creativity and a body of strengths to choose from, teachers may be able to keep habitually absent students coming to school.

This study may spark additional research into the area of strengths and victimization. As no causality can be inferred from these findings, a study using an experimental design may illuminate the advantages, if any, to a strength-based anti-bullying campaign. Such a model would likely take a much longer period of time in order to investigate.

This study focused on victimization and strengths. It may be of interest to study bullies themselves from the standpoint of strengths. It is possible that bullies may have common areas of strength that are being expressed in a negative way. By fostering these strengths and instructing the students on how to express and develop them constructively, it is possible that the bullies may be encouraged to abandon their aggressive behaviour in favour of more positive pursuits.

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## Appendix A: Cover Letter Given to Students

Dear Student,

You have been chosen to take part in a research project being done by members of the Department of Psychology at Lakehead University, in partnership with Lakehead Public Schools. We want to find out certain strengths that you may have, good relationships you may have with others, and other things that you think you do well.

We are also interested in finding out some information about bullying. Bullying can sometimes be very upsetting for students it happens to. By doing this research, we hope to learn some things that may help students who are bullied.

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to answer some questions, which will probably take you about 1 hour to complete in class. Because we know your privacy is very important, any information that tells us about who you are (for example, your name) will not be included in the study and kept in a secure place.

If you choose, you may stop answering the questions at any time, and any information you already gave will not be included in our study. This is a volunteer activity.

Thank you,

Chris G. Anderson

## Appendix B: Cover Letter Given to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child's school has been chosen to take part in a research project being done by members of the Department of Psychology at Lakehead University in partnership with Lakehead Public Schools. We want to find out certain strengths that your child may have, good relationships he or she may have with other students, and other things that your child does well.

We are also interested in finding out some information about bullying. Bullying can be very upsetting for students when it happens to them. By doing this research, we hope to learn some things that may help students who are bullied.

If you allow your child to take part in the study, they will be asked to complete three questionnaires, which, in total, will probably take about 1 hour to complete. Because we know your privacy, and that of your child, is very important, any information that tells us about who you and your child are (for example, your child's name) will not be included in the study and kept in a secure place at Lakehead University.

If he or she chooses, your child may stop answering the questions at any time, and any information he or she already gave will not be included in our study. This is a volunteer activity for your child.

Thank you,

Chris G. Anderson

Please Direct Correspondence or Questions to:

**Chris Anderson**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 5534**

**Dr. Edward Rawana, C. Psych.**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 8453**



### Appendix C: Cover Letter Given to Lakehead Public School Board

To Whom It May Concern:

Schools within your district have been selected as a possible participant in a study conducted through Lakehead University's Department of Psychology. We want to find out certain strengths that students may have, good relationships they may have with other students, and other things that they do well.

We are also interested in finding out some information about bullying. Bullying can sometimes be a very troubling experience for the people it happens to, and we hope to find some information that may help people who are bullied.

If you permit these schools to take part in the study, students will be asked to complete three questionnaires, which will probably take about 1 hour to complete in total. These questionnaires are the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, the Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale, and the Strengths Assessment Inventory. Teachers will also be asked to provide information regarding the students' attendance to the researchers. Privacy of your students and teachers is very important, and so anything that could personally identify anyone involved in the study will be kept separate from the rest of the information we gather.

If they choose, students may stop answering the questions at any time, and any information they already gave will not be included in our study. This activity is totally voluntary.

Thank you,

Chris G. Anderson

AUTHORISED NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AUTHORISED SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Direct Correspondence or Questions to:

**Chris Anderson**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 5534**

**Dr. Edward Rawana, C. Psych.**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 8453**

**Appendix D: Cover Letter Given to Principals**

#### Appendix D. Cover Letter Given to Principals

To Whom It May Concern:

Your school has been selected as a possible participant in a study conducted through Lakehead University's Department of Psychology. We want to find out certain strengths that your students may have, good relationships they may have with other students, and other things that they do well.

We are also interested in finding out some information about bullying. Bullying can sometimes be a very troubling experience for the people it happens to, and we hope to find some information that may help people who are bullied.

If you allow your school to take part in the study, students will be asked to complete three questionnaires, which will probably take about 1 hour to complete in total. These questionnaires are the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, the Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale, and the Strengths Assessment Inventory. Teachers will also be asked to provide information regarding the students' attendance to the researchers. Because we know your privacy, and that of your students, is very important, anything that could personally identify anyone involved in the study will be kept separate from the rest of the information we gather.

If they choose, your students may stop answering the questions at any time, and any information they already gave will not be included in our study. This activity is totally voluntary.

Thank you,

Chris G. Anderson

PRINCIPAL'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Direct Correspondence or Questions to:

**Chris Anderson**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 5534**

**Dr. Edward Rawana, C. Psych.**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 8453**

## Appendix E: Cover Letter Given to Teachers

To Whom It May Concern:

Your class has been selected as a possible participant in a study conducted through Lakehead University's Department of Psychology. We want to find out certain strengths that your students may have, good relationships they may have with other students, and other things that they do well.

We are also interested in finding out some information about bullying. Bullying can sometimes be a very troubling experience for the people it happens to, and we hope to find some information that may help people who are bullied.

If you allow your class to take part in the study, students will be asked to complete three questionnaires, which will probably take about 1 hour to complete in total. These questionnaires are the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, the Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale, and the Strengths Assessment Inventory. You will also be asked to provide information regarding the students' attendance to the researchers. Because we know your privacy, and that of your students, is very important, anything that could personally identify anyone involved in the study will be kept separate from the rest of the information we gather.

If they choose, your students may stop answering the questions at any time, and any information they already gave will not be included in our study. This activity is totally voluntary.

Thank you,

Chris G. Anderson

TEACHER'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TEACHER'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Direct Correspondence or Questions to:

**Chris Anderson**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 5534**

**Dr. Edward Rawana, C. Psych.**  
**Dept. of Psychology**  
**Lakehead University**  
**Thunder Bay, ON, Canada**  
**P7B 5E1**  
**Tel.: 807.343.8888 ext. 8453**

## Appendix F: Consent Form for Students

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My signature on this form shows that I agree to take part in a study by Chris Anderson and Dr. Edward Rawana on strengths, bullying, and absenteeism.

By signing this form, it means that I understand the following about the study:

- I. I will answer some questions about bullying, behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. I expect that this will take about an hour.
- II. My teacher will be giving information about my attendance to the researchers.
- III. I am a volunteer and I can stop taking part in the study at any time. Any questions I have already answered will not be included in the study.
- IV. There is no known risk of physical or mental harm to myself.
- V. The information I provide will be kept private.
- VI. The information gathered by this study will be stored in a secure place at Lakehead University for a period of seven years, and all information that reveals personal information about me (for example, my name) will be stored apart from the surveys.

---

Name of Student

---

Date

---

Signature of Student



## Appendix G: Consent Form for Parents

Please Return by \_\_\_\_\_

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My signature on this form shows that I agree to allow my child participate in a study by Chris Anderson and Dr. Edward Rawana on strengths, bullying, and attendance.

By signing this form, it means that I understand the following about the study:

- I. My child will answer some questions about bullying, behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. I expect that this will take about an hour.
- II. My child's teacher will be giving information about my child's school attendance to the researchers.
- III. My child is a volunteer and can stop participating in the study at any time. Any questions he or she has already answered will not be included in the study.
- IV. There is no known risk of physical or mental harm to myself or my child.
- V. The information my child provides will be kept private.
- VI. If I wish, I will receive a copy of the study's results after the study has been finished.
- VII. The information gathered by this study will be stored in a secure place at Lakehead University for a period of seven years, and all information that reveals personal information about me (for example, my name) will be stored apart from the surveys.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

#### Appendix H: Consent Form for Lakehead Public School Board

Please Return by \_\_\_\_\_

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

An authorised signature on this form indicates that the Lakehead Public School Board agrees to its schools' participation in a study by Chris Anderson and Dr. Edward Rawana on strengths, bullying, and absenteeism.

An authorised signature also indicates that we agree to the following:

- I. Students will answer some questions about bullying, behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. This will take them about an hour to complete.
- II. Teachers will be giving information about students' attendance to the researchers.
- III. Involved students are volunteers and can stop participating in the study at any time. Any questions they have already answered will not be included in the study.
- IV. There is no known risk of physical or mental harm to students, parents or teachers.
- V. The information provided by students and teachers will be kept private.
- VI. If we wish, we will receive a copy of the study's results after the study has been finished.
- VII. The information gathered by this study will be stored in a secure place at Lakehead University for a period of seven years, and all information that identifies students, parents and teachers will be stored separately from the surveys.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorised Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorised Signature

## Appendix I: Consent Form for Principals

Please Return by \_\_\_\_\_

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My signature on this form indicates that I agree to my school's participation in a study by Chris Anderson and Dr. Edward Rawana on strengths, bullying, and absenteeism.

My signature also indicates that I understand the following about the study:

- I. Students will answer some questions about bullying, behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. This will take them about an hour to complete.
- II. Teachers will be giving information about students' attendance to the researchers.
- III. Involved students are volunteers and can stop participating in the study at any time. Any questions they have already answered will not be included in the study.
- IV. There is no known risk of physical or mental harm to students, parents or teachers.
- V. The information provided by students and teachers will be kept private.
- VI. If I wish, I will receive a copy of the study's results after the study has been finished.
- VII. The information gathered by this study will be stored in a secure place at Lakehead University for a period of seven years, and all information that identifies students, parents and teachers will be stored separately from the surveys.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal's Signature

## Appendix J: Consent Form for Teachers

Please Return by \_\_\_\_\_

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My signature on this form indicates that I agree to participate in a study by Chris Anderson and Dr. Edward Rawana on strengths, bullying, and absenteeism.

My signature also indicates that I understand the following about the study:

- I. Students will answer some questions about bullying, behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. I expect that this will take about an hour.
- II. I will be providing information about students' attendance to the researchers.
- III. Involved students are volunteers and can stop participating in the study at any time. Any questions they have already answered will not be included in the study.
- IV. There is no known risk of physical or mental harm to myself, students, or parents.
- V. The information provided will be kept private.
- VI. I will receive a copy of the study's results after the study has been finished.
- VII. The information gathered by this study will be stored in a secure place at Lakehead University for a period of seven years, and all information that identifies students, parents and teachers will be stored separately from the surveys.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Teacher



### Appendix K: Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale (Original)

Below is a list of things that some children do to other children. How often during the last school year has another pupil done these things to you? Please answer by putting a tick in one of the three columns for each of the 16 questions.

	Not at all	Once	More than once
1. Punched me			
2. Tried to get me into trouble with my friends			
3. Called me names			
4. Took something of mine without permission			
5. Kicked me			
6. Tried to make my friends turn against me			
7. Made fun of me because of my appearance			
8. Tried to break something of mine			
9. Hurt me physically in some way			
10. Refused to talk to me			
11. Made fun of me for some reason			
12. Stole something from me			
13. Beat me up			
14. Made other people not talk to me			
15. Swore at me			
16. Deliberately damaged some property of mine			

**Scoring key for the MPVS:**

Not at all = 0

Once = 1

More than once = 2

Scores on the total scale have a possible range of 0 to 32, and a possible range of 0 to 8 on each of the four subscales.

**Subscales**

Items 1 + 5 + 9 + 13 = physical victimisation scale

Items 2 + 6 + 10 + 14 = social manipulation scale

Items 3 + 7 + 11 + 15 = verbal victimization scale

Items 4 + 8 + 12 + 16 = attacks on property scale

**Reference:**

Mynard, H., & Joseph, S. (2000). Development of the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale. *Aggressive Behavior*, 26, 169-178.

Correspondence to [s.joseph@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:s.joseph@warwick.ac.uk)

## APPENDIX L: Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale - Modified

Below is a list of things that some students do to other students. How often during the last two months have other students done these things to you? Please answer by putting a checkmark in one of the four columns for each of the 16 questions.

	Not At All	Once	A Few Times	Many Times
Punched me				
Tried to get me into trouble with my friends				
Called me names				
Took something of mine without permission				
Kicked me				
Tried to make my friends turn against me				
Made fun of me because of my appearance				
Tried to break something of mine				
Hurt me physically in some way				
Refused to talk to me				
Made fun of me for some reason				
Stole something from me				
Beat me up				
Made other people not talk to me				
Swore at me				
Deliberately damaged some property of mine				

**Scoring key for the MPVS:**

Not at all = 0

Once = 1

A few times = 2

Many times = 3

Scores on the total scale have a possible range of 0 to 32, and a possible range of 0 to 8 on each of the four subscales.

**Subscales**

Items 1 + 5 + 9 + 13 = physical victimization scale

Items 2 + 6 + 10 + 14 = social manipulation scale

Items 3 + 7 + 11 + 15 = verbal victimization scale

Items 4 + 8 + 12 + 16 = attacks on property scale

**Reference:**

Mynard, H., & Joseph, S. (2000). Development of the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale. *Aggressive Behavior*, 26, 169-178.

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## Appendix M: Strength Assessment Inventory

## **MODIFIED STRENGTH CHECKLIST FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: SELF-REPORT FORM**

This Strength Checklist reflects areas of strengths of the child/adolescent in:

- 1) Family / Home Functioning
- 2) School Functioning
- 3) Leisure and Recreation
- 4) Peer Functioning
- 5) Personality Functioning
- 6) Community Involvement
- 7) Spiritual and Cultural Identity
- 8) Future Goals and Aspirations
- 9) Personal and Physical Care

Modified from:

**Manual of Cognitive-Behavioural Focused Skill Development  
in the Probation Setting**

By:

**Rawana, E.P., Cryderman, B. and Thompson, B. (2000)**

**Instructions:**

**This Strength Checklist: Self-Report Form can be completed by the child/adolescent. Assessor should read the following to the child/adolescent prior to administration: “We are really interested in understanding how you see yourself. Please answer as honestly as possible. Some of the items may not apply to you. Please make your best effort to answer each question and only check *Does Not Apply* if absolutely necessary.”**



**Strength in Child / Adolescent's Functioning in the Family / Home Environment**  
**In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in the family / home environment.**

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I express concern for other family members.					
I enjoy taking part in family activities.					
I trust one or more family members with important information.					
I get along with my brothers and sisters.					
I get along with other family members.					
I care if my behaviour upsets other family members.					
I follow the rules at home.					
I am especially close to one or more family members. If yes, please provide the name and relationship of this person:					
I take responsibility for my behaviour within my family.					
I am respectful to family members.					
I complete chores when asked.					
I am open and honest with my parents or guardians.					
I care for a pet.					

**Note:** For teachers filling out this section, please answer only those items for which you have knowledge.

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Strength in School Functioning

In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in the school environment.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I study for tests.					
I use note-taking in school (such as copying from the board or writing what the teacher is saying).					
I use listening skills in school.					
I pay attention in class.					
I work by myself in the classroom when it is appropriate.					
I complete homework assignments.					
I achieve at or above my grade level in reading.					
I complete work on time in the classroom.					
I have a positive relationship with school staff.					
I get involved in school sports (try out for teams, support teams).					
I get involved in school activities.					
I enjoy school.					
I attend classes.					
I arrive on time for classes.					

**Note:** For parents filling out this section, please answer only those items for which you have knowledge.

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Strength in Leisure/Recreational Activities

In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in leisure and recreation.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I like to watch non-violent sports on T.V. (such as football, baseball, and hockey).					
I am a fan of a sports team.					
I watch an educational T.V. show.					
I participate in a particular sport outside of school.					
I enjoy listening to music.					
I play a musical instrument.					
I like to read.					
I like to write (ie. poems, stories, journal entries).					
I use the computer for age-appropriate activities.					
I enjoy artistic activities (such as photography, drawing, and crafts).					
I participate in community activities.					
I baby-sit or care for younger children.					
I can find appropriate activities to do when bored.					
I participate in physical activity (such as going for walks, bike rides, and roller blading).					
I enjoy baking or cooking.					
I enjoy games (such as board games, card games, and age-appropriate video games).					
I am willing to try new activities.					
I enjoy outdoor activities (such as hunting, fishing, and camping).					
I enjoy other hobbies (such as card collecting and scrap booking).					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Strength in Peer Relationships

In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in peer relationships.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I am a part of a positive peer group.					
I experience concern for my peers.					
I am open and honest with my peers.					
I demonstrate leadership with peers.					
I am accepted by my peers.					
I interact positively with a peer group.					
I determine safe and unsafe behaviours and make choices for myself in peer group.					
I handle conflicts and arguments with peers effectively and safely.					
I know when to get adult help for peer problems.					

The following items to be administered to children and adolescents previously or currently involved in romantic relationships:

I am honest and open with my romantic partner.					
I am committed to healthy relationships.					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Strength in Personality Functioning

In this section we are interested in understanding the strengths in your personality.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I have a sense of humour.					
I am enthusiastic about life.					
I am open to new experiences.					
I talk positively about different aspects of life.					
I use anger management skills.					
I can identify my personal strengths.					
I am confident in an appropriate way.					
I can accept disappointments.					
I can accept positive and/or negative feedback.					
If I have a weakness, I try to make up for it in a positive way.					
I have a good sense of right from wrong.					
I am willing to ask for help when needed.					
I demonstrate effective problem solving skills.					
I demonstrate creativity or artistic skills.					
I understand my own behaviours (strong self-awareness).					
I have a positive body image.					
I am able to cope with strong emotions (such as sadness and grief).					
I am able to control my emotions.					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Community Involvement

In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in the community environment.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I am an active member of a community organization that promotes a healthy lifestyle, e.g., club, team, program.					
I am respectful of community members and community leaders (ie. police).					
I am respectful of community property.					
I attend community events.					
I volunteer in community events and/or organizations.					
I feel like I'm a part of the community.					
I have a part-time job.					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Spiritual and Cultural Identity

In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in spiritual and cultural identity.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I participate in spiritual or religious activities (such as church or prayer).					
I feel a connection with nature.					
I believe or have faith in a higher power (spiritual or religious).					
I am able to speak a second language.					
I actively participate in cultural or ethnic activities (ie. Dance, song, ceremony).					
I have a commitment to cultural values.					
I am engaged in learning and expanding knowledge of my cultural heritage.					
I have a sense of pride in my ethnic roots or cultural heritage.					
I have respect for other cultural backgrounds.					
I have a sense of purpose and meaning in life.					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Future Goals and Aspirations

In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in future goals and aspirations.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I am motivated to achieve future goals.					
I work to achieve or maintain a certain grade level in school.					
I currently work or plan to get a job in the future.					
I have a plan for myself for the future (family, career, dreams).					
I am able to anticipate and plan for future life changes.					
I have appropriate commitment to my goals.					
I am willing to work hard to achieve something in the next six months.					
I use appropriate planning skills.					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



### Strengths in Personal and Physical Care

In this section we are interested in understanding your strengths in personal and physical care.

	Not At All	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Does Not Apply
I practice healthy nutrition.					
I participate in fitness activities.					
I have good personal hygiene.					
I have good eating habits.					
I have good sleeping habits.					
I am clean and tidy.					
I value a healthy lifestyle.					
I take medications as prescribed.					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix N. Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (BERS-2)

### Section 3. Youth Rating Items

**Directions:** Below is a list of items that describe you in a positive way. Some of the items will describe you very well. Other items will not describe you at all. Read each item and mark the number that corresponds to the rating that best describes you now or in the past 3 months. You must answer all 57 items. If you do not know the meaning of some of the words, ask the person who is giving you this form.

3 = If the statement is very much like you

2 = If the statement is like you

1 = If the statement is not much like you

0 = If the statement is not at all like you

Statement		IS	FI	IaS	SF	AS
1. My family makes me feel wanted	3 2 1 0		_____			
2. I trust at least one person very much	3 2 1 0		_____			
3. It's okay when people hug me	3 2 1 0					_____
4. I join in community activities	3 2 1 0		_____			
5. I believe in myself	3 2 1 0			_____		
6. I let someone know when my feelings are hurt	3 2 1 0					_____
7. I get along well with my family	3 2 1 0		_____			
8. I have a sense of humor	3 2 1 0			_____		
9. I ask for help when I need it	3 2 1 0					_____
10. I can express my anger in the right way	3 2 1 0	_____				
11. My parents and I talk about how I act at home	3 2 1 0		_____			
12. If I hurt or upset others, I tell them I am sorry	3 2 1 0	_____				
13. I care about how others feel	3 2 1 0					_____
14. I complete tasks when asked	3 2 1 0				_____	
15. I get along well with my parents	3 2 1 0		_____			
16. When my feelings are hurt, I stay calm	3 2 1 0	_____				
17. I think about what could happen before I decide to do something	3 2 1 0	_____				
18. I accept criticism	3 2 1 0	_____				
19. I go to religious activities	3 2 1 0		_____			
20. I keep myself clean	3 2 1 0			_____		
21. I ask my friends for help	3 2 1 0			_____		
22. I have a hobby I enjoy	3 2 1 0			_____		
23. When I have a problem, I talk with others about it	3 2 1 0					_____
24. I do my schoolwork on time	3 2 1 0				_____	
25. I feel close to others	3 2 1 0					_____
26. I know when I am happy and when I am sad	3 2 1 0			_____		
27. I know what I do well	3 2 1 0			_____		
28. I accept responsibility for my actions	3 2 1 0	_____				
29. I get along with my brothers and sisters	3 2 1 0		_____			
30. When I lose a game, I accept it	3 2 1 0	_____				
Column Subtotals						

3 = If the statement is very much like you  
 2 = If the statement is like you  
 1 = If the statement is not much like you  
 0 = If the statement is not at all like you

Statement		IS	FI	IaS	SF	AS
31. I complete my homework	3 2 1 0					
32. I am liked by others my age	3 2 1 0					
33. I am a good listener	3 2 1 0					
34. I let people know when I like them	3 2 1 0					
35. When I make a mistake, I admit it	3 2 1 0					
36. I do things with my family	3 2 1 0					
37. I can deal with being told "no"	3 2 1 0					
38. I smile a lot	3 2 1 0					
39. I pay attention in class	3 2 1 0					
40. I am good at math	3 2 1 0					
41. I am good at reading	3 2 1 0					
42. I enjoy many of the things I do	3 2 1 0					
43. I respect the rights of others	3 2 1 0					
44. I share things with others	3 2 1 0					
45. I follow the rules at home	3 2 1 0					
46. When I do something wrong, I say I am sorry	3 2 1 0					
47. I study for tests	3 2 1 0					
48. When good things happen to me, I tell others	3 2 1 0					
49. I am nice to others	3 2 1 0					
50. I use appropriate language	3 2 1 0					
51. I attend school daily	3 2 1 0					
52. I listen during class and write things down to help me remember later	3 2 1 0					
Column Subtotals						
Previous Page Column Subtotals						
Total Raw Score for YRS						

#### Supplemental Career Strength (CS) Subscale

53. I can name at least one thing that I want to do in my life	3 2 1 0	
54. My future looks good	3 2 1 0	
55. I have a plan for my future career	3 2 1 0	
56. I have a skill that will help me succeed in a good job	3 2 1 0	
57. I know what I want to do for a career	3 2 1 0	
Totals		